

*PART  
THREE*

*FROM THE INVASION TO  
THE DIS-COVERY OF THE OTHER*

In this third part, I will undertake a hermeneutic of 1492 from the Other's perspective. This date ceases being a historical moment and becomes a mythic, symbolic, metaphoric happening with rational significance.<sup>1</sup> The year 1492 becomes a text expressing Mayan and Aztec meanings awaiting interpretation. According to part 1, Western Europe *invented the discovery* in concurrence with Hegel's belief that civilization moved westward (Asia, Middle East, Europe, Atlantic, America) and as recognition and control of the continent between Europe and Asia. In contrast, for the civilizations that moved eastward (Middle East, Asia, Pacific Ocean toward America), 1492 took on metaphorical, mythic proportions. The year 1492 culminated in a parousia encounter with unknown gods (the first figure or *Gestalt*), who, when discovered to be human beings, came to appear as bestial *invaders* (second figure). At that point modernity's sacrificial myth of modernity supplanted the Aztec sacrificial myth, and the indigenous world experienced the *end of the world* (third figure). It is essential to interpret the significance of 1492 for indigenous peoples diachronically, since what began in the Caribbean islands has not yet been completed among some Amazon tribes who *preexist the mythic 1492*. Although this other interpretation does not comprehend 1492 as a discovery of a new continent on the globe, it is extremely important for revealing the power of the myth of modernity for modernity's periphery. The proponents of Eurocentrism in Europe, the United States, Latin America, and other parts of the periphery, have yet to grasp this interpretation.

CHAPTER

7

FROM THE PAROUSIA OF THE GODS  
TO THE INVASION

*In teteu inán in tetu ita, in Huehuetéutl* [Mother of the gods, Father of the gods, the ancient God],<sup>1</sup> lying<sup>2</sup> in the navel of the earth, enclosed<sup>3</sup> in turquoise. The God in the waters the color of the blue<sup>4</sup> bird, the God enclosed in the clouds,<sup>5</sup> the ancient God dwelling in the shadowy region of the dead,<sup>6</sup> the Lord of the fire and the year.

—Song to Ometeótl, originary being  
of the Aztec *tlamatinime*<sup>7</sup>

To discuss the Aztecs' experience of 1492, it is essential to begin with their reflexive, abstract thought. This is especially true in view of the intercultural dialogue initiated in 1989 in Freiburg.<sup>8</sup>

THE TLAMATINI

Nomadic (of the first degree) or agricultural cultures (such as the Guaranís) had not sufficiently differentiated themselves to allow for

the function of *philosopher*.<sup>9</sup> However, Garcilaso de la Vega in *Comentarios reales de los Incas* refers to such a role:

Besides adoring the sun as a visible god through sacrifices or great festivals... the Incan kings and their *amautas* or *philosophers* [—comments Garcilaso de la Vega—] traced a path with their natural reason to the true, high God lord, creator of heaven and earth.... They called this God Pachacámac, a combination of *Pacha*, the universal world, and *Cámac*, present participle of the verb *cama*, meaning *to animate*, derived from the noun *cama*, meaning *soul*. By Pachacámac they designated the soul which animates the universal world as the human soul its body.... They held Pachacámac in greater veneration than the sun whose name they did not dare to utter.... For this reason, they neither constructed temples nor offered the sun sacrifices, but adored him in their heart and considered him an unknown God.<sup>10</sup>

The *amautas* performed special functions and considered Pachacámac (from the coast of Peru) or *Illa-Ticsi Huiracocha Pachayachic* (originary splendor, lord, master of the world) as the first principle of the universe. Among the Aztecs, the *tlatimini*<sup>11</sup> received a clearer social definition. Bernardino de Sahagún, in the tenth book of *Historia General de las cosas de Nueva España*, referred to the *tlatimini* after cataloging the offices of carpenter, stonemason, painter, singer.<sup>12</sup> Fernando de Alva Ixtlilóchitl mentions governors, judges, warriors, priests, and specifically delimited *wise ones*, designated by Sahagún as *philosophers* on the manuscript's margin:

The philosophers, or wise ones, were responsible for depicting all that their sciences had achieved and for memorizing and teaching the songs conserved within their sciences and history.<sup>13</sup>

León Portilla presents some Náhuatl definitions of the *tlatimini* who were educated in a scrupulously regimented academy called the *Calmécac*:<sup>14</sup>

The *tlatimini* is a light and a thick firebrand that never smokes.<sup>15</sup> He is a pierced mirror, a mirror perforated on both sides.<sup>16</sup> His hue is black and red.... He is writing and wisdom. He is the way and true guide for others.... The truly wise person carefully maintains the tradition. He transmits wisdom and follows the truth.<sup>17</sup> Master of truth, he never ceases admonishing. He

makes wise the faces of others,<sup>18</sup> he makes them take on a face and develop it.... He holds up a mirror before others<sup>19</sup> ... so that their own face appears.... He applies his light to the world.<sup>20</sup> ... Thanks to him, the people humanize their desiring<sup>21</sup> and receive disciplined instruction.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, the Aztecs developed a negative description of the *false wise person*<sup>23</sup> and thus gave evidence of a conceptual thinking based on metaphors but exceeding mere mythic symbols.<sup>24</sup>

Young Aztecs left their families from ages six to nine in order to join the *Calmécac* community. In that absolutely regimented atmosphere,<sup>25</sup> they participated in dialogues and conversations with the wise ones (*Huehuetlatolli*).<sup>26</sup> They thus acquired a *wisdom already known (momachtique)* and the capacity to articulate an *adequate word (in qualli tlatolli)* with rhetorical discipline, as was learned in the Plato's academy or Aristotle's lyceum. The great work of the *Calmécac*, the *flower and song (in xochitl in cuícatl)*, exhibited this discipline.<sup>27</sup> The *tlamatinime* inscribed this song in codices (*amates*), recited it with or without music, and danced to it. The divine communicated with *the earthly (tlaltípac)* in this song above all and also in dreams requiring interpretation.<sup>28</sup>

Among the fifteenth century Aztecs, the proto-philosophy of the *tlamatinime*, overlooked by the European and Latin American Enlightenment,<sup>29</sup> clashed head on with the sacrificial myth of Tla-caélel. That myth supported domination and militarism, and anticipated the myth of modernity, which would replace it. Because of the tension between these currents, Moctezuma, more a *tlamatini* than a military man, hesitated in his dealings with Cortés. The *tlamatinime* admired the European navigators and cartographers and, at the same time, experienced agitation over what they believed to be the parousia of the Gods. The vanquished Aztecs understood the conquest as a brutal invasion, colonization as the *sixth sun*, or the epoch of servitude, and the spiritual conquest as the death of their gods.

## THE PAROUSIA OF THE GODS

*Tlamatinime* beliefs, such as that of the five suns, often coincided with popular convictions and those of the dominant political, warrior,

and commercial classes.<sup>30</sup> However, the *tlamatinime* also developed highly conceptualized and abstract rationalizations, which underpinned their interpretation of the new arrivals from the East, where the sun (Huitzilopochtli) is born each day.

Beyond myths, Aztec reason affirmed that not one<sup>31</sup> but two (*Ome*) lay at the absolute and eternal origin of everything. From the start, the *divine duality* (*Ometeótl*), or simply the *duality* (*Oméyotl*), resided in the thirteenth<sup>32</sup> heaven, the place of the duality (*Omeyocan*). The *tlamatinime* would have disagreed with Hegel who posited first being and nothing which combined to form becoming and movement before any specific being (*Dasein*) came on the scene. In contrast, the *tlamatinime* conceived an origin already co-determined (*i-námic*<sup>33</sup> meant *one shares*) in the metaphoric manner<sup>34</sup> of *female-male*.<sup>35</sup> They fleshed out this origin's further determinations via a highly advanced process of conceptual abstraction:

And also they said to him (1) *Moyucayatzin* (2) *ayac oquiyocux* (3) *ayac oquipic*, which means that no one created or formed it.<sup>36</sup>

Mendieta never grasped that these ontologically precise terms employed strict philosophical ratiocination far surpassing mere mythic reasoning. The first term (1) signified the *Lord who created himself*<sup>37</sup>; the second (2) indicated *no one made him*; and the third (3) *no one gave him his form*. The expressions of *flower and song* approximated an understanding of *Ometeótl* as *night-wind* (*Yohualli-Ehecátl*),<sup>38</sup> *he who is near and surrounds us* (*in Tloque in Nahuaque*),<sup>39</sup> *he who gives us life* (*Ipalnemohuani*). This less than complete explanation permits some comprehension of the text opening this chapter.

How did the *tlamatinime* explain the relation between the absolute ontological principle of divine duality and the phenomenal, temporal, terrestrial (*tlaltipac*) reality, in which we live as if *dreaming*? The divine duality unfolded itself through a *Diremption*<sup>40</sup> or *Explication* similar to the splitting of first principles characteristic of pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Scotus Eriugena. "This god-goddess engendered four sons,"<sup>41</sup> each called *Tezcatlipoca*.<sup>42</sup>

These concrete, originary principles of the universe spread out in the direction of the four cardinal points as in Chinese ontology, Polynesian traditions, and the American cultures from the northern

Eskimos to the southern Incas or Araucanians. These principles included the East, red; the North, black, for the region of death; the West, white, for Quetzalcóatl; for fecundity, and life; the South, blue, for Huitzilopochtli of the Aztecs. Although these four Aztec principles resembled the pre-Socratic foursome of earth, air, water, and fire, each Aztec principle entailed more, since it dominated a world epoch. These previous four epochs had culminated in the present age of the fifth sun, the *Sun in movement*, Huitzilopochtli, the warrior god of the Aztecs:

This sun, which follows four *movements*, this is our sun, in which we now *live*.... The fifth sun... is called the sun of *movement* because it moves upon its path.<sup>43</sup>

*Movement (Y-olli)* involved the *heart (Y-ollo-tl)* and *life (Yoliliztli)*.<sup>44</sup> *All things live (Ipalnemohuani)*, by Ometeótl via the sun, one of Tezcatlipoca's faces. Furthermore, humanity, the *macehuales*,<sup>45</sup> caught in the midst of the struggle among the four principles, could only survive by joining in solidarity with the reigning fifth sun. Nevertheless, these freely chosen efforts to secure oneself counted little in the Aztecs' tragic vision of existence, since everything was predetermined according to the *old rule of life (Huehuetlamaniliztli)*.

Love for Ometeótl regulated everything *on earth (tlaltípac)*:

Our lord, the lord surrounding us (*in Tloque in Nahuaque*), determines<sup>46</sup> what he desires, plans it, and diverts himself with it. What he desires now, he will desire in the future. He has placed us in the palm of his hand and moves us about at his fancy.<sup>47</sup>

Since humanity followed its necessary path<sup>48</sup> like the stars in heaven, the *tlamatinime* obsessively searched for the foundation<sup>49</sup> of reality where truth resided:

By chance, are human beings the *truth*?<sup>50</sup> For all this, is our song not the *truth*?<sup>51</sup> Is what is standing (*está de pie*) by chance it?<sup>52</sup>

For the *tlamatinime*, the *only thing true on the earth (nelli in tlatípac)* was the *flower and song* by which they communicated with the divinity in the community of the wise.<sup>53</sup> But one could

achieve this founding of oneself in the divinity by other ways than the mystical-philosophical experience. For instance, the Aztecs devised a religious calendar to celebrate life's rhythms according to times of the day, festive days, thirteen day-long weeks, and even the lunar, solar,<sup>54</sup> and Venusian years.<sup>55</sup> The Aztecs assigned a protector divinity to each day, week, month, type of year, and their combinations. In order to calm the entire procession of hierarchized divinities passing through the heavenly circuit each day, the Indians offered worship of songs, rites, and sacrifices, and set up festive celebrations.<sup>56</sup> The Aztecs complemented their highly regulated lives by astrology<sup>57</sup> and by interpretations which endowed even anomalous experiences with significance.<sup>58</sup>

Whereas astrology supplied a divine rule a priori for every temporal (*in tlatīcpac*) occurrence, by the hermeneutic of auguries the *tlamatinime* interpreted contingent, concrete, novel, empirical events a posteriori. That is, these auguries showed how the occurrence of past events had been necessary all along, how *they were unable to be any another way*, as Aristotle would say. Via such deterministic convictions, the tragic Aztec consciousness, shared by the people, the rulers, the warriors, and the *tlamatinime*, was assured of its fundamentation in Ometeótl's truth.

Against this background, Moctezuma comprehended the apparition of gods arriving on his coasts from the infinite *Teoatl* (Atlantic).

Those who arrived in their ships came out of the sea (*teoatl*).  
 ...And when the Aztecs approached these men from Castilla<sup>59</sup>  
 and faced them, the Aztecs ceremoniously kissed the land...  
 They believed that our lord Quetzalcóatl had returned.<sup>60</sup>

Moctezuma reasoned strategically to the conclusion that Cortés was Quetzalcóatl<sup>61</sup> when he received him in Mexico City. Although authors such as T. Todorov,<sup>62</sup> N. Wachtel,<sup>63</sup> M. León Portilla,<sup>64</sup> Octavio Paz,<sup>65</sup> J. Lafaye,<sup>66</sup> consider the emperor's attitudes to be wavering, contradictory, and scarcely comprehensible, they fail to explain sufficiently the rationality of his comportment. Moctezuma's comments are significant:

Our lord, upon your arrival you seem fatigued and exhausted.  
 You have come up to *your city*, to Mexico, to assume *your royal*



*chair*. Oh, for a brief time *your substitutes*, the lord kings Itz-caotzin, Motecuhzomatzin the elderly, Axayáac, Tízoc, and Ahuítzotl occupied *your throne*, but now they are gone. Oh, they exercised power over the city of Mexico and guarded the throne *on your behalf* for only a brief time.... No, I am neither dreaming nor awakening from a deep sleep. Now I am actually laying my eyes *on your face!* Five or ten days ago I felt anxiety and fixed my eyes on the region of the dead (*topa mictlan*) until you came among the clouds and mist. Our previous kings informed us who rule *your city* that you would return to take up again *your seat, your chair*.... Come, rest; take possession of *your royal houses*; relieve yourself.<sup>67</sup>

Moctezuma thus surrendered his throne to Cortés—exactly what Cortés desired. Well, not quite, since Cortés did not understand the offer and had no intention of occupying the throne. Faced with this novelty and subsequent ones, Moctezuma was repeatedly dismayed. Did Moctezuma behave *rationally*? Yes, *if one considers his world instead of projecting a Eurocentric perspective upon him*.

What possibilities<sup>68</sup> presented themselves to a man with his perspective, to an Aztec emperor, to a good warrior but a better *tlamatini*, to someone educated in the austere moral tradition of the wise *toltecas*? For an emperor as educated and refined as Moctezuma, the resources of his civilization afforded him three options:<sup>69</sup> (1) The recent arrivals were mere human beings—the least probable<sup>70</sup> from the Náhuatl hermeneutic perspective until later events confirming this hypothesis had occurred.<sup>71</sup> Moctezuma reasonably shelved this possibility *at first*, and he could have only known that this was actually an invasion if those later data had been available to him. (2) The only rational alternative was that they were gods. If so, which gods? Everything from the opinion of astrologers to that of the *tlamatinime* indicated that Cortés was Quetzalcóatl, possibly returning after having been expelled from Tula by the Toltecs and other peoples.<sup>72</sup> (3) In the third alternative, a variant of the second, this apparent Quetzalcóatl only masked the actual presence of the divine principle Ometeótl. This truly ominous event<sup>73</sup> would have spelled the end of the fifth sun.<sup>74</sup>

Faced with these possibilities, Moctezuma slowly decided as rationally as possible. He opted to offer the strangers homage by his gifts,

and proposed that they reclaim what was theirs, even if that would cost him his throne. He knew full well that if he confronted these strangers disrespectfully, it would have implied his end.

Preoccupied, Moctezuma caviled over these things; full of fear and terror, he fretted over what would happen to the city.<sup>75</sup>

By emancipating the empire's enemies in Zempoala or Tlaxcala, Cortés, whether divine or human, proved himself their valuable ally.<sup>76</sup> The warriors faithful to Huitzilopochtli, however, would have only commenced fighting on the side of their god if Cortés and his troops turned out to be merely human (possibility 1) or only if this seeming Quetzalcóatl had come to terminate the fifth sun (possibility 3). The people of Mexico-Tenochtitlan would lose nothing if Cortés were merely Quetzalcóatl reasserting control over his empire (possibility 2). Although different groups may have speculated about these possibilities, the ultimate decision rested with Moctezuma, and his options were limited.<sup>77</sup> If this was Quetzalcóatl (possibility 2), Moctezuma could only resign; in every other case, he could have cast his lot in with his warriors, but only after he had discredited the second possibility. So, motivated by clear strategic rationality, Moctezuma, the great *tlatimini*, resolved to renounce his empire<sup>78</sup> and hand it over to Quetzalcóatl-Cortés: "Take possession of your royal house!"

Once again, he was surprised. When the Aztecs offered the newcomers food with blood, these strange gods disdained them. Their jubilation over gold seemed even stranger, especially since they irrationally melted down into ingots the precious metal that Aztec goldsmiths had so finely crafted, and which had earned Dürer's admiration in Holland. Instead of immolating their prisoners to their gods, they slaughtered them. The oddity that Cortés did not seize power over Mexico when offered it convinced Moctezuma that he was not prince Quetzalcóatl bent on recovering his temporal power (*in tlalticpac*).<sup>79</sup> With the other possibilities still remaining, Moctezuma studied the situation carefully, since Cortés might have come at Ometeótl's behest to inflict the worst of all disasters, the destruction of the fifth sun. Therefore, Moctezuma at first endured humiliations in hopes of deferring the possibilities that the

Spaniards were only human beings who would place his life and his empire in jeopardy.

## THE INVASION OF THE EMPIRE

Something occurred, though, which Moctezuma could not have anticipated and which required a posterior interpretation.<sup>80</sup> Because of this event, the situation appeared to be a case of the first possibility, a human invasion, even though the third possibility, that of the end of the world, remained in the background:

Moctezuma was promptly advised that Pánfilo Narváez's armada from Cuba was approaching to make war on Cortés. The emperor, also cognizant that Cortés's reinforcement ships had arrived, summoned him, "Lord captain, your reinforcement vessels have arrived so that you might make battle preparations and depart as soon as possible."<sup>81</sup>

For the first time, Moctezuma became aware that numerous soldiers were available to reinforce Cortés and that all of them, including Cortés, were human.<sup>82</sup> If Moctezuma could persuade or compel these strangers to return from where they came, everything would have turned out well, with the empire, the traditions, the gods, and the fifth sun all intact. But two *new* events corroborated the invasion hypothesis and even implied a brand new fourth possibility: Cortés's defeat of Narváez and return to Mexico with reinforcements, and Pedro de Alvarado's massacre of the Aztec elites. These two events proved Moctezuma's error,<sup>83</sup> and tipped the balance in favor of the warriors inspired by Tlacaélel's sacrificial myth. These warriors had preferred to engage the Spaniards in war since they had believed that they were human from the start. Even though Moctezuma was finished, Cortés, ignorant of the Other, of Moctezuma and his highly developed *argumentative world*,<sup>84</sup> attempted to use him as before and squandered vital time.<sup>85</sup> Cortés gave the Aztecs time to ponder their discovery that he and his men were only human warriors, the front lines of an invasion of the *Cemanáhuac*, the world as the Aztecs knew it.

These events tested the *tlamatinime* vision of the world and disconfirmed and destroyed it. These occurrences discredited Moctezuma

the *tlamatini* whose own physical death was only hours away, and they ushered in the parousia of the gods. Pánfilo Narváez and not Cortés proved as *no one before* had that an invasion was taking place, just as it fell to the lot of Amerigo Vespucci and not Columbus to discover America.

Tlacaélel, the Aztec Romulus and Remus,<sup>86</sup> was born in the year of the rabbit (1398), conquered the Tepanecas of Azcapotzalco and the Albalonga of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, in the year of Pedernal ( 1428 ), and so merited the title *the conqueror of the world (in cemanáhuac Tepehuán)*.<sup>87</sup> He was responsible for reforming the empire, providing it with a cosmopolitan vision, and, unfortunately, interpreting it as requiring sacrifices from others for its flourishing.

This office belongs to Huitzilopochtli, our god: to reunite and press into his service all nations with the strength of his breast and cunning of his mind.<sup>88</sup>

The Tezcatlipocas first revealed Ometeótl, the deity greater than the fifth sun or Quetzalcóatl, and the keystone in the Aztec sacrificial paradigm:

And here is his sign, as it fell in the fire of the sun, in the divine firebox, there in Teotihuacan.<sup>89</sup>

According to the myth underlying this cryptic statement, the hummingbird god, Nanhuatzin, sacrificed his life by being immolated for all in the divine firebox. After a long night, he reappeared as the rising sun, Huitzilopochtli, a tribal god of the Aztecs. Through an imperialistic reformation that involved burning the sacred codices of all dominated peoples and rewriting their theogonies, Tlacaélel elevated this secondary warrior god to principal deity of Anahuac. The empire was founded to serve the existence and life of the sun. Since the sun's and all reality's movement, life, and heart related to blood (*chalchihuitl*), the Aztecs believed the life of the sun-Huitzilopochtli depended on human sacrifices. The Aztecs obtained their victims in the flower wars and their sacrifice justified the existence of the empire:

There where the spears ring, where the shields clang, there are the white perfumed flowers, the flowers of the heart. The flowers

of the life-giver open their corollas, and the princes of the world inhale the perfume of the life-giver: it is Tenochtitlan.<sup>90</sup>

By these myth-based human sacrifices performed in the greater temple of Huitzilopochtli, Tlacaélel's empire collaborated in maintaining the universe and prolonging the life of the fifth sun. Once the empire recognized Cortés as only human, the warriors launched a war against the intruders in order to prolong the fifth sun.

The Spaniards departed at night on the feast of Techihuitl. It was at that time that they died in the canal of the Toltecs. There we attacked them furiously.<sup>91</sup>

The Aztecs achieved little by expelling Cortés from the city on the Spaniards' "sorrowful night."<sup>92</sup> Immediately after this, the plague broke out, and the Aztecs interpreted it as ominous. In addition, the invaders reorganized forces in Tlaxcala, and, like the Catholic kings in Granada, Cortés set about debilitating Mexico. After a seige for months, the Spaniards expelled the Aztecs from Tenochtitlan, cornered them in Tlatelolco, and vanquished them:

Broken spears clutter the roads; horses scatter. Houses stand with their roofs torn off and their walls reddened with blood. Brain matter spatters their walls, and worms swarm the streets and plazas. The waters are red, as if dyed, and taste of saltpeter.<sup>93</sup> The Mexicans, totally routed and needing water, flee to Tlatelolco like women, groaning and shedding copious tears. Where are we going? Oh, friends! Is it true?<sup>94</sup> They abandon Mexico City, as smoke ascends and the haze expands.... This is what the life-giver has done in Tlatelolco.<sup>95</sup>

The invasion was complete, and the warriors overpowered. Over the years, this same tragedy befell the Mayas and the Incas of Atahualpa, and despair spread from Tierra del Fuego to Alaska. The Spaniards installed modernity by emancipating those oppressed by the Aztecs and by denying their bloodthirsty gods any more victims. The sixth sun had dawned. A new god, however, inaugurated a new sacrificial myth. The myth of Tlacaélel yielded before the no less sacrificial myth of the provident hand of God who harmoniously regulated Adam Smith's market. To secure F. Hayek's myth of perfect competition, it will be necessary to destroy the *monopoly* of workers' unions.